

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Haywood Planning Efforts

Good morning and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature. This week we'll look at a place where residents have spoken up about the kind of community they want to have, and what that means for the future of wildlife there.

If you look at the headlines of local papers across the Southern Appalachians, one of the common themes is communities wrestling with blossoming development - wrangling over subdivision ordinances, stormwater control ordinances, new roads, approving new developments, not approving new developments. Everyone is aware that the Southern Appalachians, a once sparsely-populated region, is quickly filling up with new people.

Usually discussions about dealing with growth are reactionary – something gets planned that a group of people don't want, then there's community organization against it, city council meetings fill up, there are letters to the editor, and eventually the issue at hand gets resolved one way or another. However, a recent project in Haywood County, North Carolina took a proactive stance, challenging the people of that county to come together and envision the kind of place where they want to live, and look at what needs to happen to get it there.

Haywood County is home to the endangered Appalachian elktoe mussel. It's home to Cold Mountain and the Shining Rock Wilderness. It's the gateway to Great Smoky Mountains National Park's Cattaloochee Valley. It's a community where natural resources play no small part in the economy and lives of people who live and visit there.

With the help of North Carolina State University and their Watershed Education for Communities and Organizations program, Haywood County community members, leaders, and outside professionals, came together for five workshops designed to look at encouraging growth and development sensitive to natural resources and quality of life.

The group heard presentations on water quality, low-impact development, and landslides. They divided into smaller groups to study issues like roads and natural areas even more deeply. When the dust had settled, what this group, ranging from realtors to wildlife biologists, had crafted was a list of recommendations –from minimizing the number of residential street cul-de-sacs to amending local ordinances to encourage more compact developments. The goal of these recommendations is to protect the county's natural resources so the endangered Appalachian elktoe mussel has clean rivers, elk roam in the forests, and people enjoy calling it home.

Of course, since they just finished this process, these recommendations are little more than ink on paper. Now is the time for the local governments of Haywood County to take them up and

begin the implementation. What we've seen in Haywood County is a good model – a community coming together and deciding how development should be done so it doesn't ruin the quality of life or the natural beauty and resources that make the area such a draw.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.